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TAGS: PGOV ASEC SOCY PHUM MOPS CG AO CF

SUBJECT: BAS-CONGO UPDATE: CONGOLESE POLICE CONTINUE OPERATIONS AGAINST BDK MILITANTS IN BAS-CONGO

REF: A. KINSHASA 218
1B. KINSHASA 243

Classified By: A/DCM D. Brown for reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: MONUC continues to receive reports of violence involving Congolese police forces and members of the politico-religious movement Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) in Bas-Congo province in the aftermath of the initial operation in February 28 (ref A). MONUC's information indicates police continue to deploy to and move through the province in pursuit of BDK militants. It is now reluctant to provide an overall estimate of casualties, but has a second mission currently on the ground to assess the situation. End summary.

¶2. (C) SRSG Alan Doss, Acting Force Commander General Bikram Singh and other MONUC officials briefed P3 2 ambassadors at MONUC headquarters March 17 on the latest developments in Bas-Congo. These included several recent incidents which MONUC has been able to verify. On March 14, the police destroyed 23 houses in Muanda whose residents were suspected of BDK connections. On the same day, MONUC discovered a mass grave in Luozi containing 14 bodies. On March 11, a MONUC military observation team found two bodies in a river in Bandakani. (Note: throwing bodies in a river has been a practice of Congolese security forces to conceal evidence in previous clashes with BDK. End note.) At the same time, additional Congolese police continue to deploy to the region, with the UN reporting 650 reinforcements in Seke Banza.

¶3. (U) Separately, Radio Okapi reported March 14 that police beat two people to death in Kisantu on the suspicion of belonging to the BDK. The same report noted that BDK militants had kidnapped a police officer in the town, which led to a firefight resulting in two deaths and two officers seriously wounded.

¶4. (C) In the course of the briefing, Doss cited a recent BBC story based on a leaked MONUC report claiming that at least 68 people have been killed, dozens wounded, and that more than 300 BDK members had gone missing since the beginning of operations. Reuters also filed a story based on the same information. Doss underscored that the report was in fact a rough draft and that there is still no consensus within MONUC as to the precise number of casualties. However, MONUC analysts told us previously that they suspected at least 60 people had died since the beginning of the operation (ref B), and a list of reported deaths presented by MONUC in the previous week's P3 2 briefing closely approximated that number.

¶5. (C) Doss emphasized that MONUC does not question the need

for the central government to re-establish authority in Bas-Congo, nor does it support BDK's territorial claims to areas of the medieval Kongo kingdom. At the same time, he said he has cautioned the government that excessive use of force risks pushing the BDK underground. He said President Kabila and Minister of the Interior Denis Kalume are concerned that the situation not deteriorate into a parallel image of the crises in eastern Congo. The president of the provincial assembly, who is not a member of the governing AMP coalition, has requested an end to police operations and the withdrawal of reinforcements.

¶6. (C) Doss noted that MONUC has only approximately 200 personnel in Bas-Congo and little capacity to expand those numbers, given its large commitments in the east. Even this small number has, however, displeased Governor Simon Mbatshi.

Doss suggested the idea of joint MONUC-Congolese police patrols to Kalume, but did not indicate if Kalume was receptive to this offer. It is not clear, however, to what extent Police Inspector General John Numbi has pushed aside Kalume in taking charge of the current operation.

¶7. (C) Comment: Doss stressed that the area in question, north of the provincial capital of Matadi, is difficult to access. MONUC currently has an investigative mission on the ground, following the return of its humanitarian team last week, and their reports should provide the first independent verification of the many claims made against police and BDK militants in the area. End comment.

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